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ABSTRACT

This paper presents excerpts from the introductory and summary chapters of an interim report published in January 1986, the first of three reports to be produced as part of the National Assessment of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA) Chapter 1. The interim report, which is intended to provide an analytic and demographic framework from which to view the actual operations of local Chapter 1 programs, describes the background and purpose of ECIA and summarizes a wide range of information about those members of the population whom Chapter 1 is intended to benefit. The three goals of this report are the following: (1) examine all students who could be or have been called "educationally deprived"; (2) discuss impact of trends in childhood poverty on Federal aid programs; and (3) analyze program beneficiaries. A range of possible changes in Chapter 1 provisions are suggested that would alter local school and student selection practices and focus the program more specifically either on achievement or on poverty, or on both. Notes to the two excerpted chapters are included. (PS)

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POVERTY, ACHIEVEMENT AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION SERVICES

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POVERTY, ACHIEVEMENT AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION SERVICES[1]

Chapter 1
Introduction

This is the first of three reports to be produced as part of the National Assessment of Chapter 1. It responds to the statutory requirement that an interim report be provided to Congress in January 1986, and is designed to provide policy makers with a demographic perspective from which to view Chapter 1. It summarizes a wide range of information about those members of the population whom Chapter 1 is intended to benefit. A second interim report, to be provided in July 1986, will summarize available information about the effectiveness of Chapter 1 and other compensatory education services. The final report from the National Assessment, to be submitted a year from now, will describe the current operation of the program--how students are selected to receive services, what services are provided to them, how programs are designed and resources allocated, and how programs are administered.

Chapter 1 Programs

Chapter 1 programs, so named because they are authorized by Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA), receive the largest share of Federal assistance for elementary and secondary students. Funded at over $3 billion annually, Chapter 1 constituted roughly 21 percent of the U.S. Department of Education's FY 1985 budget. Since the passage of ESEA, Title I, 20 years ago, Federal investments for this program and its successor, Chapter 1 of ECIA, have totaled over $45 billion.

Chapter 1 supersedes Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), but it retains the same basic purposes as Title I. The purpose of Chapter 1 is "to continue to provide financial assistance to State and local educational agencies to meet the special needs of educationally deprived children, on the basis of entitlements calculated under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965..."[2]

Like its predecessor, Title I of ESEA, Chapter 1 is based on the premise that poverty and school achievement are related; that children living in poor households or in poor neighborhoods are more likely to have difficulty in school. Consequently, they are more likely to need extra help to compensate for the effects that an impoverished environment has had on their learning. Section 552 of Chapter 1 states that "the

Congress recognizes the special educational needs of children of low-income families, and that concentrations of such children in local educational agencies adversely affect [the educational agencies'] ability to provide educational programs which will meet the needs of such children."[3]

In keeping with this premise, the legislation allocates funds primarily on the basis of the number of school-age students from low-income families who reside in school districts.[4] Districts, in turn, must select schools to participate mainly on the basis of the low-income students residing in their boundaries.[5] After services have been established in schools, the particular students to be served within the chosen schools must be selected on the basis of their educational need, rather than on the basis of their family's poverty.

Defining Intended Beneficiaries

Since the program's inception, policy makers have debated over who should be eligible to receive compensatory educational assistance. For some, the program was to focus on poor students, regardless of their educational achievement; for others it was to focus on low-achieving students regardless of their family's income. Questions regarding who should benefit from compensatory education took on so much importance in the mid-seventies that the National Institute of Education (NIE) devoted an entire volume of its final report to Congress to that topic.[6] At that time, Congress was considering the possibility of allocating funds to districts and schools, as well as to students, on the basis of achievement. When reauthorizing Title I of 1978, Congress decided to continue allocating funds to districts and schools on the basis of poverty rates, in part because of the dubious feasibility of implementing an achievement criterion and in part because achievement criteria would effectively reward those school districts which had large numbers of low-achieving students, thus perhaps encouraging them to teach their students less rather than more. However, Congress retained the provision requiring individual students to be selected on the basis of their educational achievement.

As part of that first Congressionally-mandated study of compensatory education, NIE also found that family poverty was in fact related to students' educational achievement. Generally speaking, a youngster's chances of doing well in school were diminished if he or she came from a poor family. The association between family poverty and student achievement was not especially strong, however. There were still many poor youngsters who did well in school, and many low achievers who were not poor. On the other hand, when looking at schools rather than individual children within the schools, the

association was much stronger: schools with large proportions of poor students were far more likely to exhibit lower average achievement scores than other schools.[7] This latter finding is important, given the program's requirement that schools be selected on the basis of the number of children from low-income families who reside in their attendance areas. A rather large body of research now exists confirming these findings: poverty and achievement are related both among individuals and among schools, but they are much more related among schools than among individual students.[8]

The population of intended beneficiaries for this program is often referred to as educationally deprived. Not all educationally-deprived children are eligible for the program, however, because services are not provided in all schools or grade levels. To be eligible, a child must first reside in an eligible school attendance area--usually an area with more poor students than the district's average. If the child's school is selected to operate a Chapter 1 program, the child will only be selected to participate if he or she is enrolled in one of the grade levels in which the program operates, and scores below a specified performance level on an achievement test. Thus, the child who participates is one who meets several criteria, some of which relate to circumstances, while others relate to ability or need. Because of this sequential procedure for identifying potential Chapter 1 beneficiaries, and because decisions regarding the selection of schools, grade levels, and individual students are dependent on local demographic characteristics and purposeful local policy, it is not possible to estimate the national need for this program by applying a preconceived definition of "educational deprivation" to students nationwide. In this regard, Chapter 1 differs significantly from programs such as bilingual education or special education for which it is possible, at least in principle, to estimate the total number of eligible children nationwide.

Despite these definitional problems, concerned policy makers need to know how well the program is achieving its purposes, and one of those purposes is to meet the special needs of educationally-deprived children. Consequently, policy makers often ask such question as how many eligible students there are, how many of them receive services, and are there ineligible students receiving services. Yet because student participation depends on a series of decisions made by school districts, students who participate may not be those who are the most educationally-deprived. Questions regarding how well Chapter 1 achieves its purposes may be better informed by an examination of educationally-deprived children than by an examination of eligible children.

Purpose of this Report

Rather than restrict itself to students who are eligible for services, this interim report from the National Assessment of Chapter 1 first examines all students who could be or have been called "educationally deprived"--students who are either poor or low-achieving, without regard to their residence or grade level. Only after this examination does the report focus on students who are eligible for Chapter 1 and those who actually receive compensatory education services. The report is an interim report, and is intended to provide an analytic and a demographic framework from which to view the actual operations of local Chapter 1 programs. The final report from the National Assessment, to be provided in January 1987, will describe how school districts select schools and students to participate in their Chapter 1 programs, the characteristics of the schools and students actually served by the program, and how Chapter 1 students differ from other students. It is our hope that the findings described in the final report, regarding school and student selection practices, can be judged at least in part on the basis of findings described here about the characteristics of educationally-deprived students.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Excerpts from the Introductory and Summary Chapters are presented here. The entire document is available from The Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402.

2. Section 552, Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, 1981.

3. In addition to the funds it provides to local educational agencies to serve these youngsters, Chapter 1 authorizes funds for state educational agencies to cover administrative costs, and it authorizes funds for services to three other special populations: certain handicapped youngsters, neglected or delinquent youth, and the children of migrant workers. The National Assessment, however, focuses on the central portion of the Chapter 1 program: grants to local educational agencies.

4. Allocations also take into account the number of children living in institutions for neglected and delinquent children, or being supported in foster homes with public funds, if these children are not already counted under the separate allocation for programs operated by State agencies for neglected and delinquent children.

5. School districts have a number of options for identifying eligible attendance areas. They may use either the number or the percent of students from low-income families, or a combination of these measures. In addition, they may include all of their schools if their attendance areas do not differ substantially in their concentration of poor children, and they may include all attendance areas in which at least 25 percent of the students are from low-income families. Finally, a school may be eligible if it was eligible in either of the two preceding years.

6. National Institute of Education, Using achievement scores to allocate Title I funds. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977.

7. A. Wolf, The relationship between poverty and achievement. Occasional paper produced by the Compensatory Education Study Group, National Institute of Education, 1977.

8. For a review of these findings, see Karl R. White, The relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Psychological Bulletin, 91(3), 1982, 461-481.

Chapter 5
Summary and Conclusions

Federal compensatory education assistance began in earnest in 1965 with the passage of one of the Great Society programs, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. That legislation authorized funding for local school districts to support compensatory education programs for disadvantaged students. Since 1965, that legislation has been reauthorized on several occasions, revised and refined, and even superseded in 1981 by new legislation, Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act. In 1983, this National Assessment of Chapter 1 was mandated by Congress in preparation for yet another reauthorization of the legislation, scheduled to occur in 1987. The final report from this National Assessment will describe a number of aspects of State and local practices under Chapter 1.

The legislation for the National Assessment also specified that two interim reports be produced, but did not specify their content. As we planned the overall National Assessment, we decided to use these interim reports to provide broader perspectives on Chapter 1, and restrict the final report to the specific details of Chapter 1 as it is currently implemented. With regard to the first interim report, we considered three separate, though related, goals. First, in recognition of the twentieth anniversary of the legislation, it seemed appropriate to acknowledge the population of students whose existence gave rise to the program: educationally-deprived students. Second, since a number of studies had focused on poor children recently, either identifying the causes for childhood poverty or gauging the impact their numbers could have on Federal aid programs, it seemed appropriate to examine those trends as they bear on education programs such as Chapter 1. Finally, because we had received many questions from both Congressional staff and Department of Education officials about who was actually being served by the program, the interim report seemed to be an appropriate place to present analyses of program beneficiaries. There are two versions to this question. One was: Why did the Sustaining Effects Study find then-Title I programs to be serving so many children who were not poor or low-achieving? The other was: How many eligible children are left unserved?

These three goals for this report are all related to a concept that is central to the law: that of the educationally-deprived child. Ideally, an examination of educationally-deprived children would consider a number of definitions of educational deprivation, ascertain how many children fit each definition, and then determine how many of them were provided with compensatory education. But the data do not permit a satisfying rendition of that ideal. Dry statistics about

family income, education levels, races or family sizes, do not convey the web of social and psychological circumstances that surround an educationally-disadvantaged child. Yet these are the data with which we must contend.

Nevertheless, the analyses presented here have permitted a number of new insights into the phenomenon of educational deprivation. The three sets of analyses we conducted parallel the three main goals for the report.

Overview of the Findings

In Chapter 2 we examined a number of aspects of the relationship between poverty and achievement. We used two definitions of poverty: the length of time the student's family has been poor and the proportion of poor children attending a student's school. Research has shown that the families' official poverty status is only weakly related to student achievement. We found that other measures of poverty, which take into account the intensity of the poverty experience for the child, are more strongly related to educational outcomes. These measures include the length of time the child spends in poverty and the concentration of poor children attending the child's school. We found that students were increasingly likely to fall behind grade levels as their families experienced longer spells of poverty, and that achievement scores of all students—not just poor students—declined as the proportion of poor students in a school increases.

These findings are reasonably consistent with the Chapter 1 provisions. Measures of poverty concentration appear to be good predictors of average student achievement, and Chapter 1 requires districts to use such measures when they select schools to participate in the program. We also know that individual family poverty status, which does not take into account the length of time a family has been poor, is a relatively weak predictor of individual student achievement. Chapter 1 provisions accommodate this fact by requiring districts to use measures of achievement, rather than poverty, when selecting individual students to participate in the program.

Chapter 1 legislation, however, relies on official census counts of poverty to allocate funds among counties. In Chapter 3, we described the characteristics of children whose families met the official census definition of poverty as well as those who experienced long spells of poverty and those who lived in areas with high concentrations of poverty. We also examined students who were not achieving well in school. These analyses relied on separate data bases, so that it is difficult to tell the extent to which the same students were being identified by

all the analyses. There is evidence that about 75 percent of non-elderly adults counted as poor by the census are experiencing medium- to long-term spells of poverty. The remaining 25 percent counted by the census are likely to be experiencing poverty spells of three years or less. With regard to the two measures of intensity of poverty experiences, children who experienced long-term family poverty and children who lived in areas with high concentrations of poverty were both more likely to belong to minority groups, more likely to live in the Southeast, and more likely to live in small rural areas. Those residing in areas with high concentrations of poverty were also more likely to reside in large urban areas, a characteristic not reported by researchers investigating long-term family poverty. We also found that children who lacked reading proficiency were more likely to be minorities, to live in rural areas or in large urban areas, and to have less-educated parents.

The preponderance of Black children, and minority children in general, among those experiencing long-term family poverty and concentrations of poverty in their communities, suggests that minorities may be experiencing a qualitatively different form of poverty than other poor children experience. Their families are likely to be poor for longer periods of time, and their communities are more likely to contain a preponderance of poor people. To the extent that students experiencing these intense forms of poverty live in different communities from other poor students, the census counts of poverty may under-estimate the incidence of low achievement in these communities.

In Chapter 4, we examined the characteristics of those students who actually have been served by Title I or Chapter 1 programs. Relative to the population of school-age children, Title I/Chapter 1 students were more likely to be poor, to belong to minority groups, to be enrolled in elementary grades, and to attend public rather than private schools. With regard to their achievement levels, our analyses suggested that the provisions regarding the selection of schools and students do not always assure that the most educationally-deprived students will be served. Nearly 20 percent of students receiving math instruction in 1976 achieved above the 50th percentile on a math achievement test, and over 10 percent of those receiving reading [instruction] achieved above that level on a reading test. Yet some 60 percent of students scoring below the 25th percentile were not receiving services.

The proportion of such less-low-achieving students being provided with compensatory education services depended in part on the population of low-achieving students available to be served by the school, and in part on the local decision to serve many versus a few children. Schools with fewer lower-

achieving students were more likely to serve relatively higher-achieving students, and schools with relatively large programs were more likely to serve higher-achieving students, unless they have very high concentrations of poor students.

Though the data on which these analyses were based were old, more recent data sources indicated that similar patterns of achievement levels exist among Chapter 1 students today, and will probably continue to exist in the future unless Congress decides to restrict program participation in some way.

Conclusion

If Congress were not satisfied with the nature of students who participate in Chapter 1 programs, it could probably alter local school and student selection practices by altering one or more of the provisions of Chapter 1. Such alternatives could focus the program more tightly either on achievement or on poverty, or on both.

To focus the program more tightly on low-achieving students, Congress could define eligibility at a lower achievement percentile than has now become convention, perhaps moving from the 50th percentile to the 35th. Such an alteration would remove from the program most students who score above the 35th percentile rank, and would leave districts the option of either spending more money on those students who score below that mark or increasing the number of students below that mark who are served. Alternatively, Congress could require that services be provided to the most educationally-deprived students in the entire school, regardless of grade level, rather than permitting districts to focus on low-achieving and moderately low-achieving students within a few grade levels. This strategy may have the same effect as the first, in that services would need to be redistributed from moderate achievers in some grade levels to lower achievers in other grade levels. Finally, Congress could reduce the number of moderate achievers in the program by delimiting the kinds of schools that can participate. Since those schools with the lowest proportion of poor students are also more likely to serve higher-achieving students, Congress could limit participation to schools with, say, at least 10 percent poor students.

There are also several ways to focus the program more closely to poverty, and to do so in a way that would reflect more completely the apparent relationships between poverty and achievement. There already exists in the Chapter 1 legislation, for instance, provisions for providing special "concentration grants" to those districts that have unusually high concentrations of poor students. Funds appropriated to these

districts are especially likely to provide services to students who are both poor and low-achieving. Congress could also increase the number of poor students a district must have in order to receive a Chapter 1 grant, a practice that would probably also affect the characteristics of participating schools, or it could modify the school selection procedures so that a smaller proportion of schools participated. In fact, Congress could even modify the student selection procedures to further emphasize poverty. While the evidence suggests that official family poverty status is not a good predictor of student achievement, long-term family poverty is, and researchers at the University of Michigan have developed a method for predicting which five-year-olds (kindergarten students) are likely to live in poverty when they are between the ages of six and ten.[1] Use of a student selection procedure such as that developed by these researchers would focus student selection on poverty, but could also result in more low-achieving students being served as well.

The evidence presented here suggests that any of these options is likely to move services from relatively higher-achieving students to lower-achieving students. But without more knowledge of how districts select schools and students to participate, or how they allocate resources to schools and design programs to meet the needs of their students, it is difficult to gauge how successful any of these options might be, or whether they might introduce unnecessary burdens on districts.[2] The National Assessment of Chapter 1 has initiated studies of all of these aspects of local programs, and will report its findings to Congress in January 1987. These findings may help Congress determine the future of this important program.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Greg J. Duncan, S.N. Morgan, and W. Rogers, "A simple method for using current information to identify children who are likely to experience persistent poverty spells in the future." University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, unpublished and undated manuscript.

2. There is evidence that school districts restrict the number of grade levels served when their budgets shrink, and that they remove altogether their secondary-level programs. See Richard Apling, The influence of Title I budget cuts on local allocation decisions: Some patterns from past and current practice. Reston, VA: Advanced Technology, Inc., 1982.